1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
MA11 Kurd MA11

CHAPTER III.

KÛRDISH WOMEN: THEIR BELIEFS.

As Moslem beliefs generally will be described in relation to the Osmanli women, I shall not here discuss them, but merely remark that the Kûrds have the reputation of being very indifferent followers of the Prophet. It is, indeed, a common saying that "A saint cannot come out of Kûrdistan." They are careless and irregular in the performance of their devotions, and not at all inclined to keep the sacred fast of *Ramazan* so conscientiously as do their Osmanli neighbours. They object, for instance, to abstain from smoking between sunrise and sunset, and will indulge in a *narghileh* at noonday. "The Prophet did not forbid tobacco," they argue; "how could he forbid a thing he had never heard of? Besides, what is smoke?—nothing, or next to nothing." The Turks do not, however, interfere in their religious affairs. Their mosques are served by imâms of their own race, Kûrdish Mollahs expound to them the Moslem law, and their children are taught by Kûrdish schoolmasters. But, notwithstanding this fact, the theologians are, as a class, owing to their reputation for rapacity and greed, highly unpopular among their brother Kûrds. To the latter they are,

[Page 137]

1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
MA11 Kurd MA11
Yezidis MA10

or furniture. The use of such vegetables as cabbages and lettuces as food is also rigidly prohibited among them. Like the Moslems, they hold Jesus (*Isa*) in great reverence, and regard wine as the symbol of His blood. When drinking it they always hold the cup with both hands to avoid spilling its contents, and should a drop fall to the ground they are said to suck it with the lips and swallow the dust with which it has mingled. The Yezidis and Kûrdish sectarians are, indeed, generally said to be less hostile to Christians than to Moslems, and it is averred that, though they never enter an Armenian church, they often stop when passing one and repeat some prayer or invocation.

A curious form of confession and penance is also practised by these "infidels." Ten men form themselves into a kind of brotherhood, and select one of their number by lot as a scapegoat. If any one of the number is guilty of a grave sin, he confesses it to this substitute, who must vicariously expiate it by prayer, fasting, and mortification. In return for this service he is supported by the rest, who perform for him all his worldly duties, pasture his sheep, and maintain his family.

The sacerdotal order of the Yezidis is very numerous, and is divided into castes, which do not intermarry with each other, and thus are kept permanently distinct. The office of Sheikh Nâsir, or High Priest, is hereditary in one family, and generally descends to the eldest son. This hierophant is, like the Dervish Sheikhs, believed to be endowed with supernatural powers, and his skill is resorted to, not only by his

342

a hillside, the roofs of the lower tiers serving as porches for those above. The population of this community was estimated at about 150 adults. The individual house is simple, its floor of tamped earth, its windows without glass, no provision made for the escape of smoke from an indoor firepit save doors and windows, and its furnishings meager. Water is obtained from a neighboring stream. This village boasts no specialized constructions and is without shops. Larger villages, such as Batas or Dyana, have a number of buildings for special purposes, for example, the police post and the Nestorian church in Dyana, and a definite mercantile section. Fields as well as house-yards of the villagers are often marked out with extensive fences of interlaced brambles and thorns or of rubble. In the smaller village described above, cattle and other domestic animals were housed within the dwellings themselves during cold weather, and in some localss in the area caves are used as cattle-pens or sheep-folds in the winter. The "agglomerated" village pattern of rural occupation in the Middle East and in Southern Europe has been noticed often, but in the Rowandus district it is possible to find isolated farm settlements of no more than one or two houses. The Hetshir, who do not winter in the area, use for shelter a black goat-hair tent floored with rugs, in general appearance not unlike that of Arab nomads, but less complex. Some of these tents, such as those used by chieftains for summer guest-houses, are quite spacious and of unique designs.

[162] [354] [312] 366 [344] [346] 417 231 342 341 342

the wives of other officials, although this is far from a common practice. The wife of an official can be extremely lonely as far as feminine companionship is concerned. Townswomen of the lower classes suffer no such inconveniences, and associate with each other with great freedom. There is a mosque for women alone in the town, frequented by those of the lower classes, and is said by the townsmen to be used more as a clearing-house for idle talk than for pious exercises.

If the society of adults in Rowandus has its hierarchy, there is a very real, but short-lived, democracy for the children. The youngsters of all, officials, aristocrats, and townspeople, play with each other without any reference to the ranks of their parents, and choose their leaders in the same way. The son of a servant can be "chieftain" over his fellows, and the daughter of a laborer the arbiter of her playmates. This stage passes without any apparent difficulty as the exigencies of life call them to different tasks, some to school and others to work in their fathers' shops. New friendships, better fitted to the demands of relative status, replace those of childhood. It need not be thought, however, that these early alliances do not extend into later life, although such acquaintances do not visit each other's homes.

In concluding this section, it is possible to relate the society of Rowandus not only to that of the town in Ottoman times, but to Iraq and the Middle East at large, and to present several observations of some importance.

that the number of times the name of the deity is enumerated indicates the piety of the population. With the Prophet it is quite different, for one never hears him spoken of irreverently or in a secular context. It is not customary to call him by name, but rather al-Rasul, "the Apostle," or al-Nabi, "the Prophet," and either the speaker or someone else present adds, salu Allahu 'alayhi wa salam, "the prayer (blessing) of God upon him and the peace," whenever he is mentioned. The Quran is held in similar respect. The volume must never be handled with levity, or left uncovered when not in use. An official told how his servant removed his copy of the Quran from the room in which he was drinking arrack, in some way personifying the book, in which the use of alcoholic beverages is forbidden, as God himself. Metal cases or cloth envelopes, usually green in color, are used to enclose it, or else it is tied up in a scarf or handkerchief.

The great mosque, Jami's al-Kabir, in Rowanduz is a large, square building of rubble on the central square of the bazar or mercantile area, its rear wall facing the qibla, the direction of Mecca, to which prayer is addressed. The building on its front is raised about six feet above the square and one reaches its porch by a series of roughly cut stone stairs. The roof is of mud rolled on bundles of poles and twigs, and covers the porch as well as the main room and the annex. This is to the right of the main door, a small door of the room opening on the porch and large unglassed windows overlooking the square. It is used for

reading, meditation, and conversatio, and the chief mulla or priest is usually found there. There is no furniture in this room and its floor is covere with carpets. Mattresses run along the sides on which visitors seat themselves cross-legged, and the interior wall contains niches which serve as shelves for a large number of tattered copies of the Quran and other devotional works, the only public library in the town. One must remove his shoes before entering this annex or the main room of the mosque. The latter room because of its large size, has four tree trunks stripped of their bark set up at four point around its center to serve as columns for the support of the roof, crotches of the trunks holding the heavier rafters. The walls are plastered and whitewashed, and the ceiling is unfinished. The floor is covered with a number of carpets and mats. In the center of the rear wall is a plain, pointed niche, the mihrab, which indicates the direction of prayer. To the right of this niche is the minbar, the "pulpit," in this case a crudely-made set of wide wooden steps, something like a short ladder, leading up the rear wall about three feet from the floor. At the hour of prayer the mulla takes his place facing the mihrab or niche, and those assembled in the mosque form ranks behind him and imitate his intonations and gestures. On Fridays, if a sermon is called for, the mulla ascends one or two steps of the minbar, and stands facing the congregation to speak. This main room has no windows and the door is open. Outside there is a flight of stone steps leading to the roof from

which the mu'ezzin calls the townspeople to prayer. To the right of the porch, on the street leading up through the bazar, is a pump, in 1951 in disrepair, for those desirous of praying in the mosque to make their ablutions.

The great mosque resembles those classical examples to be found in the cities of the Middle East in general aspect, and differs from them in certain ways.[1] It boasts no minaret or tower from which the mu'ezzin might give his call, and does not have an interior courtyard containing a tank or fountain of water for purification. More importantly, it is used by many of the townsmen as a sort of club, and one may find a number of them in the hours between prayers, seated or lying on the carpets of the main room, discussing purely mundane matters. In addition to the wearing of shoes, smoking and taking refreshment are forbidden within the mosque, as are animals or immature children. Strangers may sleep on its floor at night if they wish. It is commonly held that the restriction of the mosque to religious exercises, as in those of the cities, was a result of Ottoman influence, and it is interesting to find its secular uses preserved in Rowanduz. The other three mosques in the town are nondescript rubble buildings with flat mud roofs. One of these, the women's mosque, is found above the bazar near the civil officials' club, and is notorious in town life as a center for gossip. Men are not permitted to enter it. Both townsmen and the chieftains make use of the mosque

[1] Eberhard, 1951, pp. 14-17.

whenever they feel inclined, but members of the government elite avoid them. The wives and daughters of wealthier households rarely visit the women's mosque, perhaps because in some matters the women are far less democratic than the men.

It is commonly said that Islam has no priesthood, but at least one author has written an entire volume to disprove this thesis.[1] The functions of the mulla in Rowandus serve to support the latter view, for they are extremely similar to those of a Christian divine. The mullas in Rowandus have no other occupation, and are supported by funds provided by the townspeople. They are responsible for the maintenance of the mosque and the administration of waqf, bequests to the faith. They conduct the services in the mosque, and officiate at such occasions as the naming of a child, circumcision, betrothal, and death. They have certain judicial powers, as noted in connection with divorce. On the other hand, they are not formally ordained, nor are they subordinate to any higher authority, although they may, if they choose, be attentive to such figures as, say, the Shaykh of Islam in Egypt or the Mufti of Jerusalem. There were three mullas in Rowandus in 1951, of whom the unofficial leader was Mulla 'Abd al-Karim Effendi, in charge of the great mosque and the control of waqf.

There is no standard pattern for achieving the priestly office. In Kurdish Iraq a youth who has chosen

[1]Zwemer, 1946.

E: Leach E-5 (1938) 1940 MAII Kurd MAII
Rowanduz

000 40

778 his shoes before stepping onto the stone. Here the Bible reading
771 prayers five times a day and those who feel like it join in. The
633 average commoner is very vague about his prayers; many do not pray at
782 all, those who do usually pray only at sunset. The Agha on the other
hand are frequently economically overburdened of my acquaintances
Kurdish Aghas of Dergala in particular make a tremendous fuss about his
prayers and ritual washings. It was interesting to note that he would
often break off in the middle, give orders to his servants, and then go
on again where he left off. While one can have no insight into his
real religious feelings, I got the impression that it was largely done
for show. There is a definite prestige value attached to being a
devout Mohammedan - it is the characteristic of a gentleman. In the
same way the Aghas consistently make a show of being very strict about
the ceremonies and washing of their womenfolk when strangers are present
while commoners, if they bother at all, are lax and casual.

782 A man must not of course go to the mosque to pray. Each man's
prayer mat is in effect his own mosque. The actual practices varies in
different villages depending I fancy upon the example set by the Agha.
Anyway I noticed that there was always a much higher attendance at
prayers when the Agha was there in person. The connections seem to be
analogous to those of English churchgoing, there is a much bigger
attendance on the Sabbath. The devout Kurdish Aghas of Dergala for
instance said his prayers at home all the week but on Fridays attended
at the mosque, and most of the village went too.

777 Some villages have a supplementary roofed building which is
used as a mosque during the winter, but this is not invariable. In
• 36 the Sorbahlie area and on the plain the mosque is normally a roofed
building with adjacent attendant. In this case prayers are held either
within the covered courtyard or on the roof.